

system has attained considerable development, chiefly to cope with the timber industry and tourist traffic.

The light railways of Belgium date from 1875, when a Tramways Act, somewhat similar to our own Act authorizing light railways, was passed. Owing, however, to some causes unknown, probably financial difficulties and lack of enterprise, only one line had been started after three years. The State then, feeling the necessity for something being done, and probably being urged to build lines in which it had not too much faith, decided to have the whole matter closely looked into, and a Royal Commission was accordingly appointed in 1881 to go into the question and report. The order of reference was, shortly, as follows:—

- (1.) To what extent is it necessary for the State to participate in the building and working of light railways?
- (2.) Whether the local bodies might co-operate with the State in this work.
- (3.) To what extent the rigid regulations governing the plant and working of standard railways might be relaxed in connection with light railways.
- (4.) Whether there was any danger of light railways taking away business from the State railways.

The investigations of this Commission were lengthy and careful, and as a result it was 1884 before an Act could be framed and passed embodying their recommendations, and that Act required slight modification in 1885. However, since that time, when the *Societe Nationale des Chemins de Fer Vicinaux* was inaugurated, the record has been one of steady progress—I might almost say phenomenal progress; and even now, when there are, in a country no larger than Otago, over 4,000 km. (2,490 miles) of State railways and over 4,000 km. (2,490 miles) of vicinal railways, we find that extensions are still being vigorously carried on.

The table below will give an idea of how the system of vicinal railways has expanded, and at the same time how its financial side has also developed:—

Year.			Lines open.		Gross Revenue.	
			Kilometres.	Miles.	Francs.	£
1887	..	..	323	201	965,977	38,639
1888	..	..	439	273	1,749,211	69,968
1892	..	..	991	616	3,975,648	159,026
1896	..	..	1,341	833	6,500,667	260,027
1900	..	..	1,840	1,143	9,841,515	393,661
1904	..	..	2,494	1,550	13,534,156	541,366
1908	..	..	3,215	1,998	18,991,353	759,654
1912	..	..	3,981	2,474	26,760,951	1,070,438

NOTE.—The sterling values may be slightly incorrect owing to fluctuations in the exchange value of the franc.

Up to the end of 1912, the date of the last annual report, the National Society had received concessions for 179 lines, totalling 4,744·63 km. This shows a growth of concessions of nineteen lines, totalling 579 km., in the past four years. All these lines are not yet built, but, as shown in the above table, 157 lines, totalling 3,981·51 km., were actually open for traffic on the 31st December, 1912.

In addition to villages, towns, and cities which have local organization, being divided into “communes,” the whole country is divided into nine provinces, something like our counties, except that for the purposes of the provincial government the *whole* of the population of the province is included, the communes not being excluded as our boroughs are excluded from the counties.

The annual report of the National Society contains a table showing the distribution of the vicinal railways in each province with respect to the population and the area. In the absence of similar information with regard to the State railways, this may give a somewhat misleading proportion, but as a measure of the extent of the lines it is correct, and is therefore given herewith:—

Province.	Population.	Area : Square Miles.	Mileage of Vicinal Railways.		
			Per Province.	Per 10,000 Inhabitants.	Per 100 Square Miles.
Antwerp	987,201	1,094	337	3·45	30·8
Brabant	1,494,416	1,268	397	2·67	31·3
West Flanders	878,417	1,249	411	4·71	32·9
East Flanders	1,125,814	1,158	278	2·92	24·0
Hainault	1,239,712	1,438	523	4·25	36·4
Liege	890,918	1,118	293	3·32	26·2
Limbourg	279,170	932	212	7·67	22·8
Luxembourg	231,314	1,706	257	11·23	15·1
Namur	363,449	1,414	233	6·47	16·5
On frontiers	..	..	4	..	..
Totals and averages ..	7,490,411	11,377	2,945	3·93	25·86